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JOHN

THE

BAPTIST



LOFTON



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JOHN THE BAPTIST

(In Verse)

BY

GEO. A. LOFTON

"Semen est sanguis Christianorum"

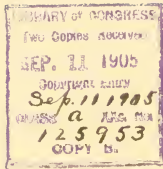
—TERTULLIAN

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PREFACE.

The author's aim in this short production is to bring out the grandeur of life and character pictured in the brief career of John the Baptist; to develop the evangelicity of his doctrine and work as symbolized in his baptism; and to demonstrate that he was a heroic Baptist martyr who sealed his testimony, as such, with his blood—who left us the imperishable treasury of Baptist doctrine and practice, first taught in the gospel—and who bequeathed to us the sacred name we bear, the symbolic patronym of all saving truth and grace contained in the word of God. The merit of the poem is left to the judgment of the reader—its effect for good to the blessing of God.

G. A. L.

(3)

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(4)

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

I. JOHN'S CHARACTER.]

I

Of noblest birth, in priestly line, was John
The Baptist, manhood's greatest son; for none
Of woman born than he was greater save
The Son of Mary who than man was more.
With Spirit filled from mother's womb and framed
In sturdy mould and stern, Elijah come
Again was he—the antitype of that
Ideal prophet flamed of God in word
And deed and chariot-borne above in fire,
Not born as other men to die.

II

Elijah-like he was and sudden came
Unknown of men, in desert bred, and pure
From touch of earth and times corrupt, afraid
Of none, Ahabs nor Herods dread, nor men
Of any state. Though clad in camel's hair

And leathern girt, on locusts fed—though ne'er
To kingly palace known or raiment soft—
Within him lived a princely soul that lodged
A man of men, a man of God imbued
And kept that none could taint or terrify,
Though born, unlike his prototype, by hands
Of men to die.

III

Within that soul enshrined was virgin life
And truth unsoiled by human cult, or creed,
Or doubtful custom. Freedom-bred was he,
Unshackled was in thought and purpose high
His God alone to serve and glorify,
And faithful prove to mortal man.
As desert lion lone, with shaggy lock
And beard, he lived the king of self and men,
And scorned the prey of meaner things that taint
The baser sort. Upon his pallid face
And wan that flashed with eagle eye, there reigned
The holy mien of godly life and force
Of character that mystery enthrone,
And men attract, and sinners move. About
His rugged brow that knit with student care,
There gathered fast and deep the pregnant clouds
Of earnest, anxious thought that vivid broke

With lightning flash and thunder peal, and flood
Of grace upon the multitudes that heard
Entranced, repented and believed.

IV

With fervid lip and burning tongue, and filled
With God, he spake with eloquence divine
That pierced the heart of Judah's frozen pride
And darkest Galilee. From far and near—
From mountain, hill and dale—from city great
And village small—the hosts of Israel dead
Were quickened and moved to hear the magic voice
And feel the magic touch of John whose might
No earthly charm possessed—no earthly force
Endued—no earthly law controlled.

V

And whence this power of John the Baptist great?
This lonely hermit of the wilderness?
The desert wild and solitude his home
And college were, where God and Nature taught
And whence he drew his creed of righteousness
And truth that mercy warmed and love, unwarped
By policy of men or priestly craft,
By science or religion falsely called.
The beasts and birds so free on Judah's hills,

The fish that sport in Jordan's stream and glad,
To him companions closer were than men,
And friendlier to God. The bloom of Spring
And Summer's fruit—the fading Autumn leaf
And Winter's grave—that varied seasons brought,
To him revealed the constant laws of God
And changeless order fast in sun and moon
And star, that good and mercy wrought for man
Through providential care. He heard the voice
Of God in thunder peal, and saw his glimpse
In lightning gleam, and felt his power in storm
And tempest grand that swept the verdant vale
Or tore the mountain side; and through the change
Of desolating death and nascent time,
Beheld the shadowed curse and cure of sin,
And felt afar the resurrection joy
Of life renewed.

VI

Within his hand he clasped with open page
The Word of God—the Testament of old;
And thus he looked and clear, with eye undimmed
By fleshly film or worldly hue, into
The books of God and Nature true—the old
And oldest revelation—both divine
And pure. By nature true and Spirit-filled—

To nature true and Spirit-led—he grew
To manhood's noblest prime in righteousness
And truth, and graduate with honors first
In God's great university.

VII

Of men who knew him not he saw enough
To human nature know and judge by self
Observed and from the Word of God. He probed
The depths of mortal sin, of racial guilt
And doom; and hence his deepest thought on Him
That was to come. The sacred Book he searched
From Genesis to Malachi, as taught
Of God and studied weary years. In type
And shadow lit—in every prophet writ—
“The Lamb of God” he saw, as *slain*, from earth's
Foundation old, the sin of earth to take
Away.” Of Bible inspiration full, to John,
There was no doubt; and hence to man
The trumpet never blew that gave a sound
Uncertain. Nought he cared for critic high,
Or critic low, nor yet for Hillel wise,
Gamaliel great, or Saul—for doctors learned
Nor Scribe or Pharisee. Untrammelled thus
By school of Jew or Greek, of cult or creed—

And far from modern university—
The Baptist came upon the scene as “sent”
Of God, as mortal free from earthly touch,
Divinely called and qualified to preach
The Gospel true and point the world to Christ,
“The Lamb of God.”

VIII

For every time and mission high a man
Of God prepared there is; but since the day
Of John the Baptist great—and save the day
Of Christ and his apostles true—the world
Hath never seen another John—his like!
Not all th’ apostles so, as John, were great
And true; and since their day the leaders grand
Of thought and deed, of reformations bold,
Of progress wide and reaching far, the world
Have marred by selfish aim, conflicting creed
And multiplied division born of strife.
Of such was not the simple John and true—
With Spirit filled and taught of God—and great
In brave humility, chivalric plumed
In honor bright, the knighted herald armed
With truth and righteousness, puissant come
To war and win the way for Christ.

IX

And such a man essential was to break.
Between the old and new the light of life
And liberty that dim had flickered o'er
The past from hopeful glimpse of coming Star
Of Bethlehem. The shackled ages gone
Were dead beneath the tread of despotism,
Religious, Civic, Social—all; and e'en the law
That Moses gave, became the bondage dread
Of yoke that none could wear and live—
That brought, at last, the deadly cult and creed
Of Pharisee, the curse of lifeless form
And orthodoxy. John was legal cast,
But Spirit-born anew and Spirit-filled
With gospel light and life, and fit alone
Of God and culture stern to break the chains
Religious forged, and point the world in bonds
To liberty—the coming Christ. The first
Of Freedom's sons was John, free born and bred;
And lone and loud from wilderness that typed
A desert world, proclaimed the Kingdom Come
Of him that blossom should as Sharon's rose
And lily fair in all the world's great waste
Of sin and woe.

II. JOHN'S BAPTISM.

I

He sudden rose in Judah's wilds and preached
On Jordan's sacred shore, and there beneath
Its liquid bosom deep and pure baptized
The thousands who, repentant, sin confessed.
His theme was Christ to come, whose kingdom was
At hand, that, unrepentant, none could see
Or enter. Signified repentance was
By fruits of righteousness that worthy grew ;
And symbolized remission was of sin
By water pure—outward washing typing full
The inward cleansing which repentance wrought.
'Twas righteousness, Josephus shows of old,
Preceded first baptismal rite, as held
Of John—the righteousness of faith that looked
To Christ and not to law, repentance moved
And fruitful proved, that sin's forgiveness brought
As shadowed forth in water.

II

'There were who proudly came to John and sought
Baptismal rite upon the boast of birth

In Abram's line—the lofty Pharisee
And Sadducee—nor bore the fruits that show
Repentance. John the viper brood refused;
Them warned to flee the wrath to come, as men
Of lowest birth, nor think to say within
Themselves that Abram old their father was.
The God of grace could children raise alone
To Abraham by faith in hearts of stone,
Repentance-moved and spirit-born; nor all
The flood of Jordan's stream, because of faith
Or blood ancestral claimed, could make them such.

III

'Twas here that John the fundamental stone
Of Gospel order laid on which to build
The structure strong of future church erect—
“Believers' Baptism,” Jesus taught; nor blood,
Nor birth, nor will of man—parental faith
Nor holiness—nor any fed'ral bond,
Ancestral, carnal or religious shown—
Baptismal rite can e'er bestow. Not e'en
The noblest seed of faithful Abraham,
Though circumcised and righteous held by law,
Adult or infant born, lineal right
Could show of baptism.

IV

'Twas thus that Baptist John the primal step
That infant rite implied, and every form
That ritualistic holds of Christ, forestalled—
And once for all. Religion true of Christ
To come, or having come, is Spirit-born
And freedom-bred to pers'nal trust in Him
And voluntary so; nor ever wrought,
Except by grace, in Abram's seed, through faith;
In Jew and Greek the same, to whom alike
The "promise" holds. Salvation's thus "to all
The seed" that's Spirit-born, and not by force
Of faith parental, priestly proxy, nor
Of Sacramental rite, nor organism;
For fed'ral holiness, or sin, that's born
Paternal, or communicate by man,
Abhorrent is to grace that saves alone
The "whosoever" comes by faith. Our Christ
Alone is Head—our Prophet, Priest and King—
To whom the soul direct must come, and not
Through Pharisaic scheme of indirect
Redemption—carnal medium wrought.

V

The fleshly seed of Abraham, indeed,
Were fleshly circumcised to signify

A fleshly covenant that keeps intact
A fleshly line that only typifies
The spiritual—the seed of Abraham
As circumcised in heart by faith in Christ
And born again of God, and symbolized
By water now. But circumcision ne'er
Hath saved a soul, in man or infant born,
Nor doth baptismal water save, nor help
To save, through covenant relation, nor
By sin's remission, thus secured. The blood
Of Jesus Christ alone, by faith, the soul
Can cleanse from all unrighteousness.

VI

As "sent" of God the Baptist came, and so
"From Heav'n" his baptism was, and not "of men;"
Nor did it circumcision substitute,
As Pharisee and Sadducee who sought
It thus in line of Abram, seemed to think
It then, or now as Pedobaptists hold.
The rite was new in form and new designed
To symbolize the evangelic new,
And not the legal dispensation old
That held the Jew in bondage ever lost
In shadows dim of better things to come.

The typic sprinklings ceased as signs of things
Imperfect—so of circumcision save
As fam'ly badge of fleshly Jew—and so
Of paschal lamb and sacrificial blood
That none could perfect make; but gospel rites
O'erwhelming represent, in symbols full,
The perfect work of saving grace through blood
That crucial flowed and death that dug the grave
Of Christ who rose again to give us life
And wash our sins away. And so 'twas thus
Of John's baptismal form—all-over washed
Because all-inward cleansed and quickened from
The death of sin through faith in Christ to come,
Repentance shown and fruits of righteousness,
That full remission brought, eternal so,
From sin's o'erwhelming guilt and doom. Alas!
To sprinkle or to pour for rite of John,
Baptismal, symbolizes shadows past,
But not the substance of the gospel.

VII

And so it was that John the genius fixed
Of gospel truth and order, ere the scheme
Was full revealed. No semblance hath the church
Of Christ to legal form or order old;

For under 'grace we are, nor under law,
Nor any carnal covenant that shapes
The Church in legal frame. Of Sarah old,
The woman free, we are, and children true
And freedom-born of Isaac's seed in line
Of grace; but Ishmaelite in bondage born
Of law, of Hagar's pedigree, the church
Is not. Jerusalem the free we are
And born above, but not Jerusalem
Below. The Mount of Calvary we touch
In love, and not old Sinai in fear.
The infant rite is Sinaitic born
As substitute of circumcision old
And misconstrued, and placed amiss in line
Of covenantal grace; and so the same
Of legal sprinklings all and kindred rites
In every form as ritualistic means
Of grace that shape the Church in legal form
And bondage born of Moses.

VIII

'Tis true there were before the days of John
Who saw the day of Christ to come—believed,
As Abel, Abraham and Moses—so
Of thousands more that saw the bloody cross

In type and prophecy that saved the soul
By grace, as now so then; but nought there was
Of Gospel Church, or rite, or form, till John
The Kingdom preached and Christ the Church
Did organize. The saints of old were born
Of God the same as now through faith in Christ
To come, as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Job
And Abraham, before the carnal rite
Of circumcision, seal of righteousness
Alone that tokened Abram's faith, but ne'er
The faith of saint who since believed, except
As type of heart renewed of seed in line
Of Abraham that's Spirit-born as he;
For circumcision nought avails to save
The soul, uncircumcision neither so,
But only faith that works by love in heart
Renewed; and what was true of legal rites
Is true the same of gospel forms, to save
The soul. Nor dispensation old, nor church
Of Christ, at hands of priest or preacher bold,
Essential *arbitrary* ever held
To ope or close the doors of heav'n or hell
To mortal man. Of faith it is that grace
May reign to save the soul; and "*all* of grace"

It is or "*none*," nor aught of water, work
Nor priestly hands.

IX

The saints of old to theocratic fold
Belonged as ruled by law, and not to church
Of Christ, the democratic fold, and ruled
By grace. The fold of old in bondage lived,
Though typic still of Kingdom free, because
Elect and kept of God external so;
And though the real sheep remained among
The typic sheep, yet free and Spirit-born
He lived above the law. The child he was
Of Abraham by faith and circumcised
In heart—the antitype of typic Jew
Himself did represent and live among,
As circumcised in flesh. The "olive good,"
Religion true, the root and fat of which
Was Abram's faith in Christ, was thus retained
In line of Israel old, the ancient fold,
Till Christ, the substance true of "olive good,"
Had come and grace revealed to all the world.
Believers thus of Christ among the Jews
Were "natural branches" graft into this tree;
But *unbelief*, at last, did break them off,

And in their stead the Gentile branches grown
Of "olive wild," religion false, by *faith*,
And not by carnal rite, nor priestly hand,
Were grafted in.

X

'Twas thus that John the Baptist formed the link
Betwixt the old and new in Spirit line,
The same in ages all and never broke
From Abraham till now—nor Adam back;
But left behind the legal shadows all
And introduced anew the gospel rite
That symbolized in full the whole of grace
That saves by faith in Him who was at hand.
And so he preached as prophesied so long—
As typified by Kingdom old and dead—
The Kingdom new and now, at last, begun
At Jordan's stream, within whose waters pure,
As we shall see, he set in type the shaft
Of truth, and monumental grand, of death
And life again of Him the world should save,
Before he came and symbolized the fact
Himself. Of God it was designed in heav'n
And shaped in form and fashion so that all
Of truth that saves was writ in liquid light
Upon its crystal sides; and there it stands

To-day, for every age, in mind of man
The true and starting point of progress grand
And Christian held to all the world. As when
Old Joshua twelve stones did set in midst
Of Jordan's stream to mark the line between
The wilderness and promised land, so Christ,
At hands of John, did set the landmark first
Of Kingdom new against the Kingdom old,
In Jordan's flood, where ages changed their front
And faced, in resurrection hope, to God
And future glory. This baptismal rite
Of John did monumental shadow forth
The world as risen from the dead and lift
To God; from Jordan old to every land
Of earth we know, each sea and lake and stream
Hath since a million times, in every age,
This typic stone erect again that John
Set up.

III. JOHN'S PREACHING.

I

But John was Baptist preacher great, and sound
In doctrine true, as practical and plain
As true. He boldly lashed the hypocrites
Of lofty line that to the waters came
With Abrahamic claim, as viper broods
That must repent to flee the wrath to come,
And fruitful worthy show, to be baptized.
So Herod, King of Galilee, that much
Admired the Baptist, came and earnest sought
To hear; and faithful John, to save his soul,
The King reproved of evils which his life
Had cursed and foul adultery—and but
For wicked wife, his soul he might have kept.
The people came and cried: “What must we do?”
What fruitage bring to show repentance true,
And be baptized? To those that had, he taught
To give; to those in office, honesty;
To those in arms, content and peace with man;
And thus in love and truth the masses showed
And plain the ways of God.

II

With axe of truth as keen as razor's edge,
And only broad to humble honesty,
He laid at root of Judaistic tree
That ritualistic bore the fruit of death—
Proclaimed to all the earth that every tree
Of good unfruitful shown, cut down should be
And cast into the fire by Him who was
To come and close at hand ; whose fan was in
His hand his threshing floor to thorough purge
Of worthless chaff and burn with quenchless flame ;
His wheat in garners high, and safely there,
To gather.

III

No honied words, no latitude of phrase
That doubtful leaves, no posing attitude
Or action fine or intonation art
Affecting truth, no empty platitude
Of speech, he used to sinners faithful warn,
Or scourge the sins of men he told to flee
The wrath to come. Before the prophet, stern
And true, the trembling sinner stood in awe
Of God and coming doom, repented and
Confessed ; and deep beneath the Jordan's flood
Obedient was to symbolize his sin's
Remission.

IV

“With many other exhortations preached”
The Baptist there of “tidings good unto
The people.” Volumes scarce could full unfold
His short but mighty ministry of truth
And love that righteous warned his fellow man
Of coming wrath, and thousands led to faith
In Him to come. ’Twas thus that John the way
Prepared, the paths made straight, the valleys filled,
And mountain high and hill did level low,
For Him, the King, whose reign had now begun
In hearts of men, and whom, as such and close
At hand, the Baptist herald loud proclaimed.
“Till John the law and prophets were: since then
The Kingdom’s preached of heav’n”—of which was
John
And which he preached as preached it was by Christ
And his apostles all—and “every man
Into it presseth,” *since*, or else by force
Do “take it,” both before and after day
Of Pentecost, that some deny in vain.

V

The Baptist’s fame had reached its height, when all
The region round had flocked to hear his voice

And feel his power. It stirred the heart and far
Of Israel old and reached the nation's head;
And questions startling rose, in places high,
That sought to find in terms of prophecy
The who and what the Baptist was. To some
He seemed Messiah come, to others still
Elias more, or prophet Moses-like
Of promise old; and priests and Levites wise
To John, betimes, were sent to institute
An inquisition Judaistic—type
Of all the inquisitions since that guard
Established order old and keep intact
The Pharisaic rule.

VI

The Baptist great, and grander yet in his
Humility, disclaimed the semblance e'en
Of Christ; and though Elijah-like and come
As he in spirit-pow'r, declined the name
Of prophet typified, or prophet old
As Moses-like. A "*voice*" alone was he,
Obscure, nor gave himself a name, save "*one*,"
As "*crying in the wilderness*" for God
And human good—to herald Christ, the King,
Who coming after him preferred before
Him was, whose sandal strings to loose

Himself unworthy held. 'Twas thus the "voice"
That soon should cease—the "one" of self and pride
Bereft—replied.

VII

But still the inquisition blind the meek
Confessor pressed: "If thou be not the Christ,
Elijah not, nor promised prophet, why
Dost thou baptize?"—a sign they seemed to feel
As Messianic mark essential to
His Kingly reign and coming.

VIII

The lowly Baptist, lofty and sublime,
And filled with God—ambition, pride and self
Unknown to him—the answer humbly made:
"In water I baptize to signify
Repentance and remission symbolize
Of sin; but He that cometh after me
Shalt thou baptize in Holy Ghost and fire."
And so it was at Pentecost the church,
With Spirit filled and gift with tongue of fire,
Endued of God, was thus baptized in fact;
And sinners pierced and Spirit-born anew,
By thousands in a day, "were saved" and so
Were washed, as John baptized, and "added" to

The Church with spirit filled and tongue
Of fire.

IX

External and symbolic was the work
Of John and brief: eternal was the work
Of Christ and Spirit-wrought within the hearts
Of men and so upon the Church. The work
Of John was but the introduction brief,
The shadow cast before the great event
To come and soon, the which "confessed" by him,
"Denied he not." But little like was he
The thousands who themselves have seemed to feel
The major part of God's redemptive work;
Or who exalt the human side of grace
Above the side divine; or who themselves
And human nature boast, as if our God
Beside them was exceeding small, or else
Dependent. John the Baptist felt himself
As nothing but a "voice" impersonate—
The voice of God who through him spake
To men. Of man he only thought as lost
And needing God; of man he nothing asked
Except to do him good; to God he bowed
In everything. How small we preachers seem
Beside this man of men—titanic in

Humility, and in simplicity
Gigantic man—in courage, hero brave
Who fearless preached the truth and duty did
Despite the odds and to the death!

X

The model preacher John the Baptist was.
With Spirit filled and taught of God the truth
Of sacred word, he spake right on, nor spake
Amiss his fellow man to please and souls
Forget. As dying man before the dead
In sin he stood in view of judgment yet
To come; nor honors mortal shown, nor more
The terrors mortal threat, e'er turned his eye
From God and future recompense. Bereft
Of self-conceit and fear of man, his God
He never questioned aught, nor asked of man
Opinion his before he spake or did.
Elijah-like he spake as God elect
And did as God direct; and good or ill
The consequence, as seemed to mortal man,
He left to God, and bore the brunt in might
Of meekness born of faith majestic wrought
And lion-like in courage.

IV. JOHN'S BAPTISM OF JESUS.

I

At last Messiah came that ages back
Foretold and nations long had looked to see.
From Galilee he came o'er weary road
And sore to John to be baptized of him.
The Baptist knew him not as then, but took
His word, and shrank at first th' unseemly task
Request, that such as he his Lord baptize.
A sinner saved by grace, yet unbaptized
Himself, he would have hindered him and cried
The rather: "Need I have to be baptized
Of thee." Though Spirit-filled and called to preach
And so baptize and teach, the Baptist felt,
Beside his Lord, the "need" to symbolize
In water first, of sin implied, his own
Remission; and, baptized or not, at best,
Unworthy felt to dip his Lord beneath
The Jordan wave—who sin knew not, nor need
Himself to signify repentance thus
Or sin's remission symbolize.

II

A moment's pause. The lowly Master caught
The startled gaze of John, and calmly spoke,
In terms of truth assurance gave, and armed
With matchless grace, conviction wrought without
An argument. "But suffer't so and now,"
The Master said, "for *thus* it us becomes
All righteousness to fulfill." With not
A word's reply, the Baptist "suffered Him,"
And down into the wat'ry grave he led
His Lord and buried there the Son of Man
And King of glory—whom he raised amain
From tokened death to tokened life again
That resurrection gives.

III

'Twas "*thus*" a duty plain, the Master taught,
Believers all in Christ, and like their Lord,
Should do; for Christ himself obeyed this law
Of "righteousness" as every law of God—
And so it "*us*" becomes. If qualified
By grace, 'tis right to be baptized, and so
It is unrighteous not to be; no saint,
The purest born, "of conscience good towards God"
Can "answer" have—no blessing can expect—

Till Christ he imitates, obeys this rite
Of righteousness and first of duties done.

IV

But otherwise and why should Christ this rite
Obey? No sin his own he had to mourn,
And no remission "thus" to symbolize;
And yet "became he sin" for us and took our stead
In guilt and condemnation—died for sin
Impute, or died for nought, and rose again
Himself and us to justify and us
To righteous make, through blood remission sealed.
'Twas "thus" as substitute he came to John
To represent, in Him, the sinner saved—
Whose sins he made his own and washed away
In blood, and thus by water symbolized.
His justifying righteousness impute
To us—th' all-righteousness in part—He "thus"
Fulfilled in Shadow clear that signified
Without, the cleansing of his blood within
The sinner's heart "from all unrighteousness."

V

But more, he shadowed forth his sorrows deep
And overwhelming lived—his crucial death
And grave enclosed—descent among the dead

And resurrection triumph won—and “thus”
By water symbolized; and so of us,
In Him, as sinners saved and dead to sin,
And raised again in soul to walk in life
Anew—and so, at last, of body dead
And resurrect from grave, millennial morn.
’Twas “thus” that Christ fulfilled, in symbol meet,
Th’ all-righteousness complete redemptive scheme
Reveals; and so must mortal saint obey
And imitate his Lord’s exemplified
Command—“for *thus* it *us* becomes”—yea, “thus
It *us* *becomes*.”

VI

The scene sublime of that baptismal hour
Hath ever touched the heart of men and moved
The world to make it kin in Christ; for there
Behold in adumbration, simply grand,
The tragedy divine and glory meet
Of Christ in drama’s noblest form and true
Of real persons present, seen in act
Sublime—the tableau great of Jesus Christ
As dead and buried, risen from the grave!
As up he rose from Jordan’s wave and went
His way, the skies were rent to witness there

The Son of God to John by sign foretold ;
And like a dove enwreathed in light and white
As snow, the Holy Ghost descending soft
Upon Him fell, as God, the Father high,
With voice of thunder peal and loud, exclaimed :
“My Son beloved is this in whom well pleased
I am !”

VII

Oh, what a scene was this for angels high
That millions must have hovered near—for John
Beneath and mortal men who recognized
The Christ thus signified of heav'n ! and where,
To human sense of sight and sound, and clear,
The Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the three
In one, in sep'rate persons met with man
To signalize in sacred rite sublime,
Their unity ! Immersion thus became
The symbol grand of Trinity—of God
In Christ immersed and Spirit-clothed—
And hence triune its sacred *formula*
In terms of Father, Son and Holy Ghost !

VIII

The symbol, too, it is of grace divine
In every doctrine taught that saves the soul—

Of birth anew by Spirit's quick'ning power—
Of cleansing blood by Jesus shed to wash
Away our guilt—of cross and sepulcher,
Of resurrection grand, of Christ and us
In Him of soul and body saved to live
Again. Immersion is the symbol whole
Of Gospel truth that signifies to save,—
A crucified Redeemer, buried, ris'n;
And giving resurrection life, through death
To sin, to mortal man.

IX

What moral dignity this sacred rite
Of John that came from heav'n! that faith demands
And life eternal giv'n, with sin renounced
And Christ confessed, as its condition fixed!
It is the badge of highest honor worn
By saint, and oath of fealty to Christ;
And woe to disobedience dread that shuns
Its cross, or sacrilege that mars its form,
Design perverts, or right forbids! It was
The way that Jesus went and now commands—
As opened up by Baptist John, the "sent"
Of God.

X

How daring then the awful crime, of Rome
Confessed, that changed the form that God himself
This sacred rite endued—and so design
And subject worse! How weak the arguments
Of those who seek to prove the Romish change
Th' original mode and purpose found in word
Of God that Rome declares she changed, though long
In practice true of ancient form! Alas!
How strange it seems there's nought too sacred writ
Of God to hold escape from sacrilege
Of change at hands of men! and nought so plain
That mortal predilection, pref'rence, pride,
Cannot pervert to doubt, or controvert!
If aught was ever clear, it is that John
Immersed in Jordan's flood the Christ himself
And thousands more—that Christ himself the same
Baptismal form enjoined upon the saved,
“Believers only”—more, that Paul its form
A washing called “in water pure,” and gave
It monumental symbol full of death
And burial, resurrection grand, that Rome
So long confessed nor now denies, and best
Of scholarship, in all the world, maintains.
No wile of philologic lore, nor pride

That Pharisaic sneers, "Indecency"—
No shift "convenience" born, nor sophistry
That "non-essential," disobedient, breeds—
No doctrine fair that claims "necessity,"
Nor argument that seeks to show, alas!
The Jordan shallow so, or else too deep
To dip—can ever prove to honest mind
And humble heart that knows enough to know,
That Baptist John did not immerse, or Christ
Command it "*thus.*"

V. JOHN'S MISSION ENDED.

I

The work of John was done. To pave the way
For Christ to come—disciples make and teach—
The Son of God to manifest to man,
His mission was. As like a summer cloud
That thundered, flashed, dissolved in rain
The world to bless, and rainbow-spanned to bode
A brighter day and fade away, so John
Decreased as Christ increased. Not all at once
The mighty man his zeal relaxed or work
Released. As speeding train from engine loosed
And swifter switched apart, momentum keeps
Till slowed by gradient friction stops, so John
Cut loose from primal purpose still impelled
But slowly drew to end his great career,
As Christ enlarged and overshadowed far
His fame and work alone preparative.
As morning star that grandly stood above
The dawn, he paled at last within the glow
Of rising Sun—but faded shone eclipsed
And blended soft with His supernal beams.

Bethabara and Enon where because
"Of water much" he still baptized, echoed
His mission yet permissive kept and so
His glory. Still he made disciples—taught
Them how to pray and oft to fast—a fact
That inquisition brought to Christ himself
By his disciples whom, as John, he taught
To pray and how, but not to fast so long
As He, the bridal Groom, and they, the sons
Of bridal chamber, were together.

II

Again 'twere John's disciples stirred by Jew
About the purifying question. They
The Baptist thus: "Rabbi, behold, 'tis he
That with thee was beyond the Jordan flood,
Whom thou didst witness there, the same doth now
Baptize, and now to him all men do come."
'Twas thus that jealousy did seem to work
Between disciples true of John and Christ,
But not between the masters who did each
The other understand.

III

The Baptist answered thus his farewell speech:
"Except it be from heav'n giv'n, a man

Can nought receive; and witness thou dost bear
I said that I the Christ am not, but
Sent I am before; for He that hath the bride
The Bridegroom is. The Bridegroom's friend that by
Him stands, Him heareth glad and greatly joys
Because of Bridegroom's voice. Fulfilled, therefore,
My joy is. Increase He must, but I
Decrease." And hence no more we hear the hint
That seemed a diff'rence sprung betwixt the two—
Disciples taught of John and those of Christ.

IV

The work of John was done. As Jesus left
The sacred scene baptismal—Jordan's shore—
The Baptist cried: "Behold the Lamb of God,"
As he had cried before, "that takes away
The sin of earth;" and thus he turned himself
To point the world to Christ. The "Voice" was hushed
That cried so long to tell of Him to come,
Except, in brief, to preach the Gospel first
That emphasized the cross—"The Lamb of God"
As slain to cancel racial guilt, the sin
Impute to all the world of Adam born
And lost to God. Theology was this
Of John, the keynote struck for every age

To come, and fundamental truth alone
That saves mankind.

V

'Twas thus that John the Baptist set the pace
For preachers all who teach the doctrine true
That crucial blood exalts and sinners win.
Vocation sole the preacher's is to point
The world to Christ, "The Lamb of God"—as John.
Disciples two, of his, that heard him thus,
That day, their master left and followed Christ—
Another John the great with Andrew named;
And yonder deep in desert wild began
To build on Baptist John's foundation laid.
With Christ, the Head, and they, the members two,
A church did organize, the first in all
The world, that grew to five and then apace
To twelve—and then to members twenty and
A hundred more—and on that wondrous day
Of Pentecost to thousands.

VI

His work was done. How sad it seems to set
Aside this mighty man, and leave him bound
To such a fate! How strange that he so young
And great—so famed among the mass of men—

And having wrought so much for God should stop
His grand career, decrease and disappear
From sight of men! Why not a place
Among the twelve and live immortal more
To share their mighty work, as some?

VII

But such was not the will of God; for John
A special mission had, peculiar so
Relate, that other place he could not fill.
The link he was betwixt the passing law
And gospel new; and though within the new
As Spirit-born, his mould was legal and
Ascetic cast, and so partook of both
The dispensations represent—alone,
Perhaps, misfit for either. Be it so
Or no, 'twas meet that John should stand apart,
His mission closed, as he had stood before,
His work and glory all his own, as done
For God alone, and so to pass from sight
As other men. Elijah stern, the type
Of John, his mantle left of old the mild
Elisha, type of Christ; and so, if true,
The same of John and Christ baptized of John
And Spirit-filled as John, but more than he
With “double portion” full, unmeasured.

VIII

How great the Baptist's popularity
With men in mass; but never won at truth's
Expense, nor kept for self or pelf, or cause
Of any kind, except the cause of God—
The good of man. Though knowing his "decrease"
Of work and fame, he willing sank from out
Of sight to honor Christ—the trial stern
And hardest yet to bear with men of mind
And heart so great and who, for any cause,
Can willing cease to be; and greater thus
In self-extinction shown, than at his height
Of fame and deed, he took the palm from all
The men to greatness known. "I must decrease,"
He said, "and he increase;" and few there are
For even Christ—to us so grander known—
That sink themselves from sight and shed alone
The light of crucial sacrifice, as John.
Ah! Who can say, to serve the Master best,
Or serve at all: "Behind the cross I'll hide
Myself and name, or cheerful cease to be."

IX

A Baptist true was John and prototype,
In every age, of Baptist true and tried

That martyr lived and died for Christ and truth.
He was the first of Baptist preachers great
Who Baptist doctrine preached, disciples made
As Baptists make and so baptize; and struck
The primal blow that Baptists strike
Against the infant rite. The Son of Man himself
He Baptist dipped, and so of members first
Who formed a church, disciples were of John
And Baptist made; and from this model church
That Baptists formed, there sprang the churches all
That apostolic grew.

X

From him we take the sacred Baptist name,
Derived from sacred Baptist rite, as seen,
The symbol true of every doctrine known
To gospel grace and truth that saves the soul,
And builds the church, or pledges fealty
To Jesus Christ. It is the name, and broad
And deep—all-comprehensive coined of God—
Distinctive marks a people true of Christ
Baptized, and churches so, that keep the word
And order writ of God, sufficient rule,
As strict construed and faithful lived.
It is the name that crowns symbolic too

The great Commission, "Go"—the mighty work
Of missions taught for all the world—as in
The name of Father, Son and Holy Ghost
Discipled millions saved, baptized must be,
As John did institute and Christ ordained.
It is the name that symbols Baptist-life
And history—dipped in blood and crowned, at last,
With liberty and progress true for all—
For all the world, and greatest boon of earth,
Despite the world's opposing.

XI

O sacred name is this and holy! Name
Of Baptist martyr first and name of those
He prototypes and symbolizes true
And all of truth they hold and practice still!
To drop that name, or change it, sacrilege
And treason be it would. 'Tis not an *ism*,
And God forbid that to it we should add
An *ism*; for that which Baptist is, is not
A *Baptistism*, nor more, *Baptisticism*.
The Baptist name we take doth symbolize
The Gospel whole. All other names applied
Specific are of sect and certain forms
Of truth and error mixed, or else and oft

Uncertain sound ; but when we say a thing
Is *Baptist so*, or *Baptist not*, we say
Enough for all that Baptists claim.

XII

The Baptist John did narrow seem to sin
And error dark—to proud hypocrisy
And pride—who preached to all the wrath to come ;
And narrow still, to some, he symbolized
And taught the sinner's only Remedy—
A Crucified Redeemer, ris'n again.
The Christ and his apostles built on John ;
Nor ages since, nor ages yet to come,
Can from his doctrine take, or to it add,
To save or elevate the world. As true
As steel and pure as gold, the Baptist was ;
And Baptist true can ne'er improve upon
His name or fame, his life and character,
His truth or work—but only imitate,
Enlarge and magnify.

VI. DEATH OF JOHN.

I

The fate of all great men and good, as John,
Who faithful and aggressive live for truth
And righteousness are persecution dread
And death predestined, where there's pow'r to kill;
And otherwise 'tis ostracism. To be
And do the truth—to hold humility
And honesty—no country, kindred dear
Nor friend, unlike himself, can mortal know.
Offense the deepest known to selfish man,
Or devil dark, is unperverted truth.
Fidelity to all the truth and whole
Of God and good for man escape hath none
From sword of lust rebuked, self-int'rest hurt,
Of pride offended, popularity
Or policy curtailed, of power dethroned,
Or mean ambition checked.

II

Not only fate it is, but badge of true
Discipleship to Christ, the loving Lord,

Whose word invokes a "woe" to all of whom
The "all" speak well. It is impossible
To duty live and suffer not, where sin
And duty war; and he that arms for Christ
And suffers not, doth only seem to fight,
Or fight a partial battle faint, nor scares
Nor hurts the Devil. Soundly true is he
And roundly great that self forgets and wars
For Christ against his foes—and *all* his foes—
For *every* human good; nor runs with hound
And holds with hare, in *any* case, to keep
His popularity, or policy
To serve, that compromises God.

III

'Twas thus with John the Baptist, *true* and *great*,
Who paid the price in full fidelity
Entails to make immortal, and secure
The martyr's crown. Though eating not, he came,
And drinking not—abstemious and pure
In life—they said: "He hath a devil." Scorned
He was and ostracised by Pharisees
And Scribes, that viper brood of hypocrites
Who came to criticise, or boastful claim
In Abrahamic line, baptismal rite,

Or question raise of his authority ;
And but for John's far-reaching fame and power
That mighty held the common people fast,
The haughty priests and theocrats had hushed,
Perhaps, the "Voice" that in the wilderness,
Did ring so long and loud for Christ.

IV

So now as then the same, and ever since,
And yet to be, of circumcision or
Its substitute, the infant rite, as seen,
The root and pillar strong of Popery
That ever inquisition made and fierce,
For ages long, of those who held it not,
And has its millions burned ; and burn again
It would except for freedom won and held
In trust by common people, born of God
And free themselves. "Beware," the Master said,
"Of the Concision."

V

Again the Baptist came in conflict dread
With Kingly power, the lust of which must be
Condoned or give offense that deadly strikes
The hero brave who speaks the truth in love.
Upon the wicked Herod, face to face,

He charged adult'ry foul with brother's wife;
And moved by her that, vicious woman-like,
The deeper sting of venom'd hate inflamed,
The Baptist seized, imprisoned, bound in chains
And would have put to death, but fear deterred
The King—the fear of those the “people” true
That counted John a Prophet great. But more
The Baptist feared because he was
A righteous man and holy—so he kept
Him safe the while from woman's vengeance vile.

VI

He oft with John communed, though much perplexed,
And heard him gladly, Felix-like, and might
Have saved his soul, but courage failed to brave
Undo the bonds the sinful past had tied—
Resist the serpent-charm and guile that none
But woman vile can wield, from which but few
Among the mighty e'er escaped without
The wreck of ruin; nor Herod was, though touched
With seeming good and much conviction moved,
Exception to the fatal rule.

VII

Alas! What fate was this that hopeless chained
The Baptist great in dungeon dark and vile —

Of gloomy castle, wrapt in solitude
Of mountain drear and wild, depressing bathed
In Dead Sea vapors—far away from field
Of active life, disciples' cheer, to close
His grand career! His time was up, 'tis true,
And closed his mission high, but why this fate
Fidelity would otherwise have seemed
To win? How sad and strange it must have been
To one who never shrank for God, nor blanched
Before a duty stern, nor ever paled before
An earthly foe! Nor is it strange that like
Elijah old, his prototype—pursued
Alike by woman fierce—discouraged deep
Should be, imprisoned thus; and dark with doubt,
Send far away to Christ to know if Christ
He was, or else should he for other look.
Why should he thus imprisoned be, if Christ
He witnessed true had come with mighty power?
And so he seemed to pine as did the great
Elijah, touched, though mighty man he was,
With human weakness born, and comfort thus
To weaker men.

VIII

As God Elijah, sunk in deep despair
For purpose high permit, again inspired

And courage gave, so Christ the message sent
To John in gloom and doubt of wonders done
By Him of word and deed—of miracles
That John himself had never done; and thus,
Perchance, the Baptist left uplift to bear
And wait in hope and cheer the fate decreed
Of him, unknown as yet, by woman's hate.
“Decrease I must, increase must He,” he said;
And thus the past forgot, the present bore,
And looked the future bravely in the face.
He doubtless hoped, despite the vicious wife,
That Herod's favor yet his bonds would break;
But though the gloomy cell was lit by ray
Of hope—and though communing oft with him
Who forged his chain—the Baptist never once
Apologized, nor softened down his charge
Against the King who stood in awe and fear
Before his pris'ner who, somehow, he heard
And gladly—tribute grand as enemy
Could give immortal dignity enchain'd
At hands of brutal lust and cowardice,
Without a fault as charged, and doomed to die.

IX

At last Herodias' hour for John had come—
Her longed and looked-for opportunity

Her patient malice nursed had waited, watched,
Till, like the hungry tigress stalking slow
Her prey, she agile sudden sprang upon
Her victim bound. The King had planned a feast,
Licentious charged with wine and lordly crowned
With revelry that inadvertent bred
Indecency and madness reckless wrought.
Herodias' daughter fair, by mother moved,
Did lewdly dance before the noble throng
With approbation loud that cheered and stirred
The King intoxicate, unconscious all
Of purpose dread, an oath to take that then
Himself could not revoke—a promise wild
That whatsoever the dancing girl should ask
It should be giv'n. The loud uproar was hushed.
"The head of John the Baptist!" boldly cried
The daughter for the mother.

X

Poor Herod sobered thus a moment—blanched
And sad, "exceeding sorry" was—but so
Infatuate with lust and wine, impelled
By sense of honor false, he blindly crushed
The touch of grief that like a spark was quenched
Within the icy gulf of oath-imposed

Conventionality. The gory head
On charger fine was promptly brought and set
Like dainty dish and light before the queen
Whose vengeful appetite for blood of John
Was sated full; and round the sacrifice
Of hate that gruesome dripped with sacred drops
She danced, perhaps, with fiendish glee that shocked
The wretched Herod whom the ghost of John
The Baptist followed to his grave—and who
When Christ to mighty fame had grown, he thought,
With terror dread, had risen from the dead.

XI

Oh! What a scene was this for devils' hate
To glut and human fiends to signalize,
Or terrify! The gory head of John
The Baptist yonder kept in mockish state,
The trophy grim of princely lust rebuked!
His body yonder bathed in blood and left
In dungeon dank for potter's field! But no,
The scene a brighter picture shows. The soul
Of John the Baptist—freed from body bound
In tyrant chains—released from duty stern
And earthly conflicts sore—by angels borne

To Paradise—has entered now the glory throng
Amid the thrum of million harps that played
The martyr's pean grand and million shouts
Triumphant salutation rang, as ne'er
Had welcome rung before. No "greater" man
"Of woman born," had ever gone to wear
The martyr's crown of glory.

XII

His poor disciples, dumb and helpless came
And took his body—precious load—and sad,
They buried soft away. Their lips were closed
To fun'ral dirge or lofty eulogy,
Except the eloquence of sighs and tears
That volumes spoke of worth immortal lived
By him and monumental love enshrined
By them; and all they could they did—except
To go and Jesus tell. The Bridegroom's friend
Was gone, and orphans his disciples were
That turned to seek, at last, the Bridegroom dear
Whose counsel sweet his comfort gave and his
Adoption—only source solution brings
To every human problem dark, and spring
Of every hope and joy.

XIII

So closed the life of John the Baptist great.
"A burning and a shining light was he;"
And none were ever greater born, or lived
A greater life, or died a greater death.
"The deep damnation of his taking off"—
His tragic end—bestowed the martyr crown
And sealed to him immortal fame that stamped
The signet of his character and truth
His mission bore upon the mind and heart
Of all the ages. God he glorified
The more; and none can tell how much himself
The deeper wrought in man by such
A death that such a life did crown. 'Twas thus
That, Samson-like, he slew in death the more
Than in his life. "The least," the Master said,
Than John was "greater" in the kingdom held
Of heav'n—in privilege and dignity—
As taught of Christ himself—as subjects trained
Within his glorious church as organized
And future built—but never man than John
Was greater born and bred to all that makes
A man—a man of men or man of God—
Nor in results of life and character.

XIV

As Teacher great the Christ compared himself
To John who mourned, as He did pipe, the truth
With none effect upon the masses deaf
Of generation dead that heard them both—
Lamenting not for John nor dancing yet
For Him; and so in both alike the same
To those who heard was Wisdom justified
Of children hers and by her work. A man
Was John, and not a reed as shaken by
The wind in wilderness, nor clothed was he
In raiment soft and imbecile in house
Of Kings, but prophet great and "*more*" than such,
The Master said. Though not the Christ, he paved
The way for Christ, foundation deep and broad
Of Kingdom great he laid that Christ had come
To build on faith, and next to Christ himself
In place and dignity—the Bridegroom's FRIEND—
Was John the Baptist.

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